QUEERING SPACE AND ORGANISING WITH SARA AHMED'S QUEER PHENOMENOLOGY

Abstract

The intended contribution of this paper is to add to the growing body of work 'queering' organisation studies by exploring how bodies, spaces and organising can be 'queered'. I draw on Sara Ahmed's (2006) Queer Phenomenology to explore the relationship between bodies and the organisation of space, in capitalist as well as alternative modes of organising. Through the analysis of semi-structured interviews with the three organisers of a queer feminist group in a British medium-size city, I explore how we might resist capitalist and other normative spaces by queering them, and how these queered spaces open up fields of action for queerer modes of organising. In so doing I further the critical project of Queer Theory in Management and Organisation Studies to interrogate the norms that give shape to organisational spaces and processes, and the tensions that might arise when refusing their straightening effects.

Keywords

Queer theory, queer phenomenology, embodiment, space, organising

Introduction

Research on LGBT identities in Management and Organisation Studies (MOS) has explored, more or less critically, the consequences of attempting to navigate hetero- and cisnormative spaces (for an overview, see Ozturk & Rumens, 2014; or Rumens, 2017). Yet these explorations, like similar ones in critical diversity research, might still contribute to attempts to render diversity 'governable' (Ahonen et al., 2014), where LGBT workers are made to be re-aligned within straight spaces (Benozzo et al., 2015). Some of these issues can be addressed through Queer Theory (see for example Bowring & Brewis, 2009; Pullen et al., 2016), as suggested by critical invitations to 'queer' MOS (Parker, 2002). This scholarship often proposes a discursive perspective focused on the subversive and political power of Queer Theory (e.g. Rumens et al., 2019) or queer identities (e.g. Courtney, 2014), while embodied approaches (see for example Adkins, 2000; Einarsdóttir et al., 2016) are less common (Muhr et al., 2016). Even more absent from this literature is the exploration of *space* as a site of organising, and how this might shape the experience of those who dwell in it (Riach & Wilson, 2014). Contending that organisational spaces shape what bodies can act and how they can act, I intend in this paper to interrogate how we might queer organisational spaces without recreating similar normative effects.

The 'queering' of MOS allows us to question the heteronormative assumptions – produced by the normative status of heterosexuality – of organisations and organisational research (Rumens, 2016). Less frequently, it has also opened up an examination of cisnormativity in the workplace – the normative status of cisgender identities (Rumens, 2016), as well as the implications these assumptions have on methodologies (McDonald, 2017; De Souza et al., 2016; Rumens, 2017). However, very little scholarship has attempted to explore what 'queer organising' – i.e. attempts to organise beyond 'taken for granted' assumptions about how to organise – might look like. And yet, this is an inherently practical question that many feminist, queer, and/or anti-racist

communities grapple with: how do we organise collectives that do not reproduce capitalist or neoliberal designs, but where we use our differences to build communities? A second intention of this paper is thus to answer Rumens et al. (2019)'s call to "expand the remit of queer scholarship in the field that nourishes further opportunities for developing queer modes of organizing politically" (p. 595), to foster collective resistance against capitalist regimes.

Taking inspiration from other feminist scholarship where similar critique has been addressed by the development of feminist phenomenology (Gardiner, 2018), I contend that Queer Phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006) gives us ways to move beyond an 'inclusion & diversity' framing of LGBT workers where their bodies are assumed to be governable, to be 'realigned' within spaces. Instead, Queer Phenomenology allows us to recognise from a critical perspective the way bodies which can't or won't align within these spaces will always be transgressive and read as 'other', and thus 'queered', as well as providing us with a starting point to begin imagining 'queer organising' as a practice of resistance against these spaces. Additionally, because it invites us to start analysis from the body and its relation to space and other bodies, without assuming what this body can do, it allows us to move beyond approaches to diversity which might focus on a particular identity (race, sexuality, gender) while rendering others invisible (Ahmed & Swan, 2006; McDonald, 2016) – especially when 'LGBT commonality resides less in a shared identity and more in a shared *alterity*' (Rhodes, 2017, p. 536, emphasis added).

I begin to unfold this argument by exploring the uses of Queer Theory in MOS, arguing that starting from bodies and space rather than discursive practices can allow us to explore the lived realities of LGBT workers and avoid using their identities as rhetorical devices (Muhr et al., 2016). Noting that the use of Ahmed's Queer Phenomenology is in large part absent from such

conversations, I then provide an introduction to the theory and explore its relevance in questioning the norms that structure organising, both within capitalist modes of productions and away from them. Drawing from an empirical case of semi-structured interviews with the three organisers of a queer collective in a British medium-size city, I explore the potential of Queer Phenomenology to think of the conditions under which the norms of capitalist space can be undone and resisted, and to imagine ways of organising queerly.

The queer(ed) body in MOS

The case for Queer Theory

Many studies in diversity scholarship have focused on the conditions for the inclusion of LGBT workers – and other minorities – without acknowledging the structural power relations embedded in organisations (Ahonen et al., 2014). Discourse on workplace inclusion can fail to acknowledge the heteronormative structure of the organisation, which can further silence minorities (Priola et al., 2014). Other studies do acknowledge the existence of structures of inequality and exclusion but still focus their analysis on inclusion as a process driven by human behaviour (see for example Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018). For example, when Collins et al. (2015) discuss the need for trans people to be allowed to perform their gender in a way that is 'comfortable' in the workplace, their analysis starts from an understanding that practices, rather than organisations themselves, make trans people feel excluded. While advocating, as they propose, for the inclusion of trans workers cannot be dismissed, they fail to recognise the way organisations themselves (Acker, 1990) but also their organisation of space and time (Halberstam, 2005) are always already structured for cis

– and male, white, heterosexual, abled – bodies. Bodies for which this space-time has not been organised will always be 'queered', or 'othered' by the norms that structure organisational life.

Queer theory, referring here as a collection of theories that have sought to "problematise, rupture and reconfigure the field of norms" (Rumens, 2017, p. 1) that structure our social lives, has been used increasingly in MOS to critically examine heteronormativity and capitalist hegemony (Rumens et al., 2019), often focusing on interrogating the norms attached to sexualities and genders and how these are integrated in organisations (see for example Rumens et al., 2019; Bowring & Brewis, 2009; Muhr et al., 2016). In more radical examples, Queer Theory has been offered as a way to interrogate more broadly the norms of organising (see for example Parker, 2002; Parker, 2016) and was even introduced in MOS to invite readers to reflect on "the normalising effects of discourse on capitalist hegemony" (Gibson-Graham, 1996, p. 544). These uses recognise that Queer Theory has applications outside the analysis of queer (or LGBT+) subjects (Rumens et al., 2019), and can be extended to the critical exploration of other normative practices beyond sexual and gender identity.

Pullen et al. (2016) posit that this 'abstraction' of Queer Theory as a subject away from its original object of study – LGBT individuals and their communities – is somewhat unique to MOS. The authors note that the "bodies, experiences and expressions of those (of us) who identify as queer get lost" (p. 2) behind this focus on 'Queer Theory'. This echoes Halperin (2003), who noted that the invention of Queer Theory as an academic subject, originally intended as a provocation, contributed to the marginalisation of 'gay and lesbian studies' for being too under-theorised, while removing itself from the 'quotidian realities' of queer life (p. 343). Perhaps this is an effect of the supposed loss of 'charm' of Queer Theory (Parker, 2016): as discussions of diversity, inclusivity

and 'gay-friendliness' (Rumens, 2017, p. 47) have progressed, organisations have moved, removed or silenced some of the frictions to which Queer Theory might have been applied. As a result, norms might come to be reinforced rather than deconstructed, thus strengthening rather than disturbing "existing relations of power or political structures grounded in hetero- and cisnormativity" (Rumens, 2017, p. 129) to produce a homonormative regime (Duggan, 2002) collaborating with neoliberalism.

However, (re)connecting studies of sexualities and gender only with discursive examinations of heteronormativity, power and identity can risk instrumentalising the embodied, lived realities of LGBT workers (Hines, 2010; Muhr et al., 2016). For one, if identities are messy, complex and unstable (Rumens, 2017, p. 32), doing research centred on 'people who identify as gay', for example, risks reinforcing the 'gendered stabilities' that a theoretical or political use of Queer Theory might try to critique (De Souza et al., 2016, p. 602). I contend that a specific focus on *bodies* is necessary to move beyond such instrumentalisation of the experiences of those who identify as queer or LGBT (Pullen et al., 2016).

The 'queer body' – embodiment, space and Queer Theory in MOS

De Souza & de Pádua Carrieri (2015) discuss how *travestis* in Brazil are excluded from the labour market because their bodies disrupt gender binaries, and further explore how exclusion comes from the way their bodies are understood and contextualised by others. Hines (2010) too highlights how the industry in which trans workers operate shapes not only how well they might feel included, but also how they might choose to perform their gender. This is further explored by Muhr et al. (2016), who show that this is highly situational and that a single trans person performs their gender

differently depending on the space that they dwell in. Adkins (2000) shows how perceptions of gender is performed as a lesbian in the workplace shapes the body through choice of clothes, hairstyle, etc. These authors' focus on embodied, lived experiences of LGBT workers shows how these people's perception and performance of their own identity is contextual and reflected by the way others perceive their bodies. Methodologically, De Souza et al. (2016) offer a reflexion on the relationship between gender and 'the body' to invite reflexivity in how we *think* the bodies of our respondents in organisation studies research. By proposing that we turn away from categories existing along the heterosexual matrix – 'gay man', 'women executives' – the authors invite us instead to consider what embodied, lived experiences we might attempt to access when seeking respondents in a study.

Taking an embodied perspective to Queer Theory does not mean divorcing oneself from recognising the structures of power that frame lived experiences or the way perceptions of the body are always presupposed by cultural norms surrounding what a body can/should do. In the works referenced above, the understanding of what 'queer' is or does is still grounded in a perspective inherited from Butler. De Souza et al. (2016) for example explicitly explore the relationship between gender and the body through Butler's work. From the perspective of transgender identities, Muhr et al. (2016) identify within this field a 'shared sentiment […] that transgender individuals negotiate their moment-to-moment *performances of gender*' (p. 56, emphasis added). As a result, while the materiality of LGBT workers' bodies is recognised in this approach, it is still done so in relation to discursive practices or specific identities ('lesbian' for Adkins, 2000; 'lesbian, gay or bisexual' for Einarsdóttir et al.*,* 2016), rather than other bodies and the space in which they dwell. Within this embodied approach to Queer Theory, as within other feminist approaches to MOS (Tyler & Cohen, 2010) or within studies of sexuality and MOS

(Pullen & Thanem, 2010), the relationship between space and the body, especially the way organisational capitalist spaces might shape queer bodies, remains under-explored (Riach & Wilson, 2014).

Similar shortcomings in post-structuralist feminist theory have been in the past addressed with inspiration from phenomenology, where 'phenomenology needs post-structuralism's deconstructive critique of power and discourse, while post-structuralism simultaneously needs phenomenology's recognition of embodiment and lived experience' (Berggren, 2014, p. 244). Feminist phenomenology for example combines the rich embodied description in the tradition of phenomenology while 'engaging with feminist theory to investigate how ideology, power and language affect lived experience' (Gardiner, 2018, p. 295). I believe a similar move to use inspiration from phenomenology in Queer Theory can address the latter's shortcomings. In particular, Ahmed's Queer Phenomenology (2006) departs from a post-structuralist position of sexuality and gender to look at 'queered' bodies, that is bodies that have been *queered* by space, and thus offers a departure – or, Rodemeyer (2017) would argue, a detour – from more discursive considerations of embodied experiences to examine how bodies and spaces might orient one another.

Queer Phenomenology

Sara Ahmed's Queer Phenomenology (2006) starts from her reading of phenomenologists such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty to offer an understanding of the ways bodies are 'shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling' (p. 9), asking: "what would it mean for queer studies if we were to pose the question of 'the orientation' of 'sexual orientation' as a phenomenological

question?" (p. 1). She further explores Lefebvre's (1991; cited in Ahmed, 2006) conceptualisation of space as *orientated* by asking how it might also be *orientating*, starting from the question of 'orientation' given by phenomenology to discuss how bodies are orientated *in* space and *by* space, here thinking space as the 'field of action' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 65) where bodily encounters occur.

She defines *orientation* as the way spaces guide bodies into aligning along certain lines. These lines are drawn from the repetition of bodies following a certain path, are "both created by being followed and followed by being created" (p. 16) and provide directions for bodies in space. But lines also divide space so that the body falls on this or that side of a line (p. 13). They are boundaries in that they 'mark the edges' of space (p. 117). Ahmed's queering of phenomenology invites us to look, specifically, at the way spaces 'queer' or throw 'out of line' (p. 66) bodies which can't or won't turn this or that way, for example bodies which won't turn to certain objects of desire, or which won't align themselves along heterosexual lines. The 'queer body', or perhaps more aptly called 'queered body', is the body which is made all too visible by not readily aligning itself along the same lines as the other bodies which constitute that space.

Extended to our object of study, *organising,* we might consider how the process of organising participates in producing spaces (temporary or permanent) which can orientate bodies along certain vertical lines. For example, organising through private, for-profit companies, which embed themselves in capitalist modes of production and have been recognized as gendered (Acker, 1990), can lead to the construction of spaces which might best align with male, abled and straight bodies. In other words, "if spaces extend bodies, then we could say that spaces also extend the shape of the bodies that "tend" to inhabit them" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 58); that is, capitalist spaces come to be fields of action for certain bodies only, and thus will come to be more readily occupied by these

bodies. Queer Phenomenology invites us to question what this might mean for bodies which are not all of these things, or none of these things: how do the queered bodies, which do not align with the vertical lines of capitalist modes of organizing, negotiate these encounters?

Furthermore, dwelling in those spaces can make it more difficult for bodies to find other ways to reorient themselves. Using the metaphor of 'handedness', Ahmed discusses the way using 'parts of the body' makes it more difficult to use other parts: the more I learn to write with my right hand, the less I know how to write with my left. If I am in a space that asks of me to use my right hand, I become 'right-handed' even though I might have preferred to use my left hand. Here, in the context of sexuality and gender identity, Queer Phenomenology teaches us that the more we work at aligning our bodies in straight spaces, the less we can imagine other orientations, other ways of alignment: "to become straight means that we not only have to turn toward the objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must 'turn away' from objects that take us off this line" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 21). Because they are orientating, straight spaces can 'straighten' queer bodies. Ahmed uses the example of Judith Butler who discusses feeling that she had to go to Yale to 'be a lesbian' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 93), to find a space in which her body could more easily align with other bodies. Queered bodies which can more or less easily align themselves along the vertical lines of these spaces can forget their queerness – even for a time, ignore it, or miss it altogether. Meanwhile, other queered bodies which remain misaligned, 'turned the wrong way', are being made visibly 'queer'. They might find it more difficult to move and act in this space, while at the same time find it easier to extend into other spaces – that is, see their field of action extended – where they are less dis-orientated. Some bodies are 'queer' because they find alignments in 'queer spaces', while other bodies are queered by being thrown out of alignment in straight spaces.

'Straight space' is defined by Ahmed as the space where 'the queer body does not extend into such space, as that space extends the form of the heterosexual couple' (2006, p. 92). Other spaces that 'queer' the bodies appearing out of line are seldom qualified via adjectives in Queer Phenomenology (2006). A passing reference to 'white space' allows Ahmed to describe spaces which take on a specific quality (white) through "the repetition of the passing by of some bodies and not others" (p. 135). This allows her to pay attention to which bodies are allowed to disappear in this space: "the white body must also be a respectable and clean body. Such a body is therefore also middle class and straight: it is a body that is 'in line' with the 'lines' that accumulate as signs of history to become institutional givens" (p. 136). By listing the attributes of so many accumulated 'lines' (white, middle class, straight) Ahmed signals that qualifying a space as 'white' should not reduce it to the colour of the bodies dwelling in it. Instead, referencing 'intersectionality' from black feminist theory (Lorde 1984, p. 114–23; Brewer 1993; Collins 1998; Smith 1998; as referenced in Ahmed, 2006, p. 136), she points to the accumulation of lines which intersect at certain points and might allow a queer, white body to extend more readily in white space than a black body. 'White' becomes a placeholder for the lines that we might pay attention to in spaces in a discussion about the effects of whiteness, but Ahmed does not reduce these spaces to only 'white', nor does she discuss 'white space' as a homogenous concept.

Similarly, I talk in this article of 'capitalist spaces', where 'capitalist' is used in reference to the socio-political hierarchies that influence and give shape not only to for-profit organisations, but also "the multitude of state, quasi-governmental, public sector, voluntary, social interest and social movement groups that make up the organisational patchwork quilt of modern western societies" (Dale & Burrell, 2007, p. 19). Following Ahmed, we can think of these socio-political hierarchies as the 'background', here understood through its temporal dimension, which affect "the conditions

of emergence" of an object (Ahmed 2006, p. 38), but also the arrival of the body that perceives this object. And so, while equating all spaces as being 'in Capitalism' would produce a discourse which renders all other forms of spaces invisible (Gibson-Graham, 2006), thinking of spaces as having a 'capitalist background' allows us to think how bodies might arrive into space already oriented in specific ways. In return, this opens us to imagine spaces that might not replicate the lines inherited from the socio-political hierarchies of Capitalism that we often find in the 'traditional' organisations discussed in MOS literature. Here we find the potential of *queering* space, imagined as organising space in which bodies are not presumed to follow specific lines, where they can move 'freely' rather than 'easily' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 136). This conceptualisation of 'queering (organisational) space' sustains the power of Queer Theory to "disrupt what we take-for-granted and understand to be normal in our lives" (Rumens, 2017, p. 15), and should not be confused with the idea of 'queer space' (or 'gay space' as discussed further below) which through Queer Phenomenology I understand as the space in which queer bodies are in alignment with the space and with each other, where assumptions of alignments might be seen as de-queering and producing new forms of normativity (Ahmed, 2006, p. 178).

While Ahmed herself recognises that her theory isn't 'phenomenological' in the strictest sense, *starting from* rather than *using* the works of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, she still offers a way to understand how bodies that don't align with certain spaces experience this misalignment, are disorientated by it and might try to orientate themselves in certain ways as a response. Beyond the frameworks proposed by Butler and Foucault, where gender and sexuality are understood from a socio-historical perspective, and where performing queerness might be understood as naming oneself as 'queer' and enacting it through cultural signifiers, Queer Phenomenology provides us with a new embodied approach to understanding gender and sexuality, but also any other way in

which bodies are made to feel othered in certain spaces, to show 'how bodies are gendered, sexualized and raced by how they extend into space' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 5). As a result, while an embodied reading of Foucault and Butler might invite us to look at heterosexual objects as "objects that depict heterosexuality as a social and sexual good" (p. 87), Queer Phenomenology invites us to look at how objects *produce* heterosexuality because of the way they are arranged. And yet Ahmed does not reject a socio-historical construction of gender and sexuality, but writes alongside it, in the same way that feminist phenomenologists invite an analysis of structural issues (Gardiner, 2018). Moving away from Husserl, she invites us to think of the background of objects – their history – and how they arrived in the space. For example, she explores how the socio-historical construction of race, and the process of racialization of spaces, have reshaped our understanding of what bodies can do in these spaces.

Queer Phenomenology is mostly referenced in MOS scholarship in literature review sections, for Ahmed's contribution to Queer Theory, or for showing how bodies come to be racialised (as by Harding et al., 2011; Conran, 2011; Girman 2012; Rumens, 2013; Cottingham, 2018; O'Shea, 2019). Riach & Wilson (2014) appear at this time to be the only ones making use of Queer Phenomenology as a theoretical framework, here to explore how workplace sexuality is constituted and negotiated in space through bodily encounters. Through the concept of 'bodily dwelling' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 4) they show for example that the presence of male workers' bodies in space shift the space's and other bodies' orientations, "ensuring no customers '[try] it on'" (Riach & Wilson, 2014, p. 338). They discuss the way the bar as a sexualised space forms 'lines of directionality': sexual encounters between workers are, rather than 'transgressive' because they happen in the workplace, instead a reproduction of the "'sexual orientations' already inscribed in the pub" (p. 340). More relevant here, the authors show how the workers have inherited a

'genealogical background' of the pub as a space for sexual encounters both for patrons and workers, which means that resisting sexualisation of labour competes against the orientations of the space and other bodies. Riach & Wilson note how both individuals' genealogical backgrounds (workers' parents having met in pubs) and wider 'backgrounds of labour' (p. 342) orient the way bodies arrive in the pub-space along certain heterosexualised lines (p. 337). They give particular significance to the pub-space as a space of production where sexualised roles are "ascribed by managerial or customer orientations" (p. 337) and conclude that "division between labourer and consumer is subsumed into the working body as part of a capitalist mode of orientation" (p. 342), showing how lines inherited from capitalism might intersect with heterosexualised lines to shape the space.

However, the authors explore less how bodies *themselves* can be shaped by these spaces and are made to become 'queer bodies' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 92) when they do not readily follow these 'lines of directionality', or when they enter a space with a different genealogical 'background'. They conclude their article by suggesting further explorations of the way bodies can be 'disorientated' through space or misaligned through 'deviant angles', and of spaces in which bodies might sustain their 'presence' having been thrown out of place (Riach & Wilson, 2014, p. 343). My intention in this paper is to explore precisely the shape that spaces can take when they are 'queered' by bodies thrown out of line (or place), and what potential field of actions might open up to organise queerly.

Methodology

These questions are explored through a research project conducted in spring 2018 in the UK, intended as a pilot study to explore the production of queer modes of organising (Rumens et al.,

2019), and the subsequent relationships of LGBT people with paid and unpaid forms of labour. I therefore limited my exploration to the three creators of a collective in a medium-size city in the UK, originally created as a response to issues of transphobia and lack of safer space policies in the formal LGBT organisations in charge of PRIDE events in the city, and in the local 'mainstream' music scene. The group quickly evolved to the creation of local queer punk music festivals and lobbying for safer space policies in the city's venues. The online presence of the group on Facebook also contributed to community-building for the 'members' of the group, although ownership of the group itself was retained by the three core organisers I interviewed (names have been changed): Lupe, who describes themselves as a Mexican-British 32-year-old writer and performer. They identify as a non-binary trans, fat, disabled, latinx, queer person of colour and a migrant; Chris, who describes themselves as a bisexual artist, vocalist, songwriter and education activist; and Ella, who is a feminist 'record lover and tea addict' using she/her pronouns. In line with De Souza et al. (2016)'s discussion of using identities – be it gender, sexuality, or other – as it relates to the participants of a study, rather than pre-drawn notions, these descriptors of the respondents come from the response they gave to the first section of questions during the first interview, such as 'how do you identify in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexuality? Have you always identified this way? What pronouns do you prefer? Do you use other labels or ways of describing yourself?'. In so doing, I engaged with efforts to be "reflexively aware of how [I might] constitute the subject(s) I investigate" (Rumens, 2017, p. 91) in allowing respondents to choose the categories that they might define themselves by, in efforts to avoid reinforcing "identity categories as fixed receptacles into which subjects are expected to pour different parts of the self" (ibid.).

The respondents were selected not because of specific identities, but because they belong to a group within a queer community, where queer is here understood as describer of what is at 'odds

with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant' (Halperin, 1997, p. 62). In addition, as a member myself of this queer community, I already had an existing relationship with them, an experience of this group and had dwelled in some of the same spaces that they discussed in the interviews. This status of 'insider researcher' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) allowed for more in-depth interviews. While this can lead participants to "fail to explain their individual experience fully" (p. 58), I believe in this case the existing practice within queer communities to discuss at length what we have in common but also how individual experiences may vary – I recall, for example, hours of conversations with Chris about similarities and differences between our coming-out experiences – allowed respondents to be very specific about these experiences. Because I shared some of the experiences discussed by the respondents, the tone at times shifted from interview to discussions, when I was to share my thoughts on the issue I had them explore. I believe sharing my own experiences with them of difficulties in navigating straight spaces created a space where they would be understood, and could feel comfortable to share experiences with me, while at the same time queerly disrupting the more traditional ways the researcher is positioned in the research process (Rumens, 2017). As a result, the findings of this research are grounded in the context of the participants' experience, but also my own, and the shared experience we created through the interviews.

Data collection was organised around in-depth, semi-structured interviews with these three core members. Each member was interviewed twice for a total of six interview, all lasting between 90 and 120 minutes: the first series of interviews focused on their identities, relationships and experiences with paid and unpaid work, and ties to the queer community. The second series of interviews was aimed at understanding the history of the group, how work was organised between them, and possible tensions. Interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. While the

original intent of the research was to identify LGBT people's relationship with paid and unpaid work via inductive thematic analysis (identifying themes such as 'queer bodies and relationship with paid work' or 'organising (in) queer space'), the deeper engagement with Queer Phenomenology and theoretical exploration of its potential in MOS led me to re-analyse this data via a more abductive process. Having identified the two key theoretical themes to explore in the data, 'queering space' and 'queering organising', I paid particular attention in this second coding round to the tensions and contradictions that appeared against these. For example, under the theme of 'queering space' I created the code '(re)aligned in normative space' when reading through the respondents' struggles and contradictions in attempting to queer space. Similarly, under the theme 'queer organising', I created the code 'missed opportunities due to alterity' which allowed me to identify some of the tensions that come up when thinking of disrupting the norms of organising.

This process allowed me to further theorise the use of Queer Phenomenology in thinking about organising space queerly. I develop this in the section below, first exploring how we might imagine queering capitalist spaces to resist their orientations, and then what shape queer organizing might take when it aims to 'disorientate'.

Queering spaces

As discussed in the theory section, I use 'capitalist space' as the placeholder to discuss the spaces defined by Acker (1990) and others (Ahmed, 2006) that extend more readily the shape of bodies that are 'white', 'male', 'straight', 'middle class', 'fit', etc. Such adjectives are also frequently used in queer communities, and indeed by the respondents in the interviews to discuss the spaces where they feel out of place. Lupe talks about 'capitalist society' and spaces being 'neoliberal',

and Ella points to both 'straight spaces' and 'gay spaces' as having queering effects. While the adjectives are useful to design spaces in opposition to what we imagine a 'queered space' might be, the purpose of Queer Phenomenology and my intention in this article is less to explore what these spaces *are* and instead to describe what they *do* – the effects they have on bodies, and what bodies can do in and to them. In other words, I explore below the idea of 'queering space' in two ways: first, by thinking of 'queering' as an adjective, where spaces are seen to have a queering effect; and second, by thinking of 'queering' as a noun, where bodies can queer space intentionally or not. Finally, I explore the tensions and contradictions that can arise in attempts to create queered spaces.

Queering effects of normative spaces

Ella talks about how being a 'wilful' feminist (Ahmed, 2017), with a body which takes more space than it 'should', led to her feeling alienated in the workplace ("*it wasn't the kind of environment where it would do me well to speak out about that kind of thing. It was basically why I eventually ended up leaving. I got kind of bullied quite a lot by people*"). She wondered whether a track-record of complaint would result in a fractured resume and lack of references, eventually hurting her chances of future employment. Similarly, Lupe shares failed attempts to work at a major retail company ("*dudes can be as big as a lorry, but people who are not men are not very welcome there if they're bigger than a certain size*"). In these instances, a 'capitalist' space might be a space where lines of economic power relations (who hires whom) intersects with lines of gendered power relations to define 'a field of inaction' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 58) in a space that does not extend the shape of their bodies.

Similar effects can be found in other spaces. While a charity shop would not be defined as 'capitalist', Lupe notes feeling out of place when volunteering among "*posh white ladies […] talking about all these luxuries*". The charity shop takes the shape of 'posh white ladies' when it comes to be occupied by bodies with their own genealogical background (Ahmed 2006, p. 137; see also Riach & Wilson, 2014). The objects these bodies turn to (luxury, travel) create these familiar lines found in some capitalist spaces.

In these examples, Ella and Lupe's bodies are queered by the spaces they dwell in: their bodies do not turn towards the same objects as others' do (luxuries and holidays abroad), or disappear behind the same lines (thinness, femininity). Yet while spaces take the shape of the bodies that dwell in them, a queered body wilfully remaining in a space in which it is out of line might not in return 'queer' space, especially because the vertical, normative line is "shaped by the *repetition* of bodily and social actions over time" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 66, emphasis added). Queering space thus would involve a repetition too, an accumulation of bodies 'out of line'.

Queering space as resistance

Ella explains the group's refusal to disappear behind existing lines:

> *"Not that gay spaces aren't needed, but I think that it's more important to go and take up space that isn't meant for us. […] That's one of the reasons we wanted to have our festival last year in [a regular bar], because who's to say it's a straight space. Gay pubs and gay bars […] don't make us feel welcome. There isn't a specific space for people like us, so we should just take up whatever space we want […]. There's no visibility if you're in your own little club hiding."*

This refusal to disappear behind the lines queers space because it is expressed as an accumulation of bodies in a 'regular bar'. This can be seen as an act of resistance: the intentional production of new "lines of rebellion […] that gather over time to create new impressions […] on the skin of the social" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 18). Ella marks a difference between the 'gay space' where she "*never felt comfortable*" and the collective's attempt to queer 'a regular bar' and produce a space "*extremely accepting of everybody*". We might here imagine the 'gay space' as a different form of orientating space, made of oblique lines that direct bodies towards other objects (homosexuality), and queers the bodies that do not follow these lines. Instead, I imagine queered spaces as shaped by bodies turning to all kinds of direction, not arriving in this space with a 'shared commonality', a same 'orientation', but with a 'shared alterity' (Rhodes, 2017) of "*people that have had that experience of trying to fit themselves into a little box or being fit into a box by other people*" (Chris).

Queering space allow bodies to extend (their reach) into that space in ways they could not before; that is, new lines create a new "field of action" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 58) for what bodies can do (Lupe: "*Myself I'd never picked up a guitar before being part of this community. It's encouraging people to do something they've not had the courage to do*"). It also creates new potential fields of actions; new histories of the bodies that 'tend to inhabit' these spaces. For example, Lupe notes the presence of young people in the audience of a conference 'asking how to start' and imagines reproducing the same effects elsewhere.

Straightening devices in queered spaces

When thinking about queering space as tracing new lines by the accumulation of bodies turned towards different objects, we must still pay attention to the straight lines. As Ahmed says, "it is possible to live on an oblique angle, and follow straight lines" (p. 172), a reflection on homonormativity (Duggan, 2002) shared by Lupe:

> "*You could be gay and stuff, but you can still live aiming for assimilation, getting married to a cop, having a house and a car, and being a landlord. 'Cause it's not just about gender and sexuality.*"

In capitalist or other normative spaces, some new lines can be traced that fit alongside older lines, so that the field of action opens up to some bodies while not opening up to others. After all, certain lines – hetero/cisnormativity, capitalism, white supremacy and imperialism – are formed from a strong background:

> "*We're still subjugated to the empire, even in places that call themselves DIY or punk. They don't let you in if you're not a man, but if they let you in you have to be a certain look: skinny, beautiful, cis white women*" (Lupe)

As explained in the theory section, lines are also what marks the edges of space (p. 117) and efforts to draw such lines can too have a straightening effect, even if that line "does not follow the straight line" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 99). All three respondents questioned who to include and exclude in efforts to queer space, revealing tensions. Ella questions the presence of Chris's straight male bandmate, worrying it threatens their attempts to queer the music space. She also worries about who will buy tickets to the shows of a festival the group helped organise, and thus what bodies will come to shape the space. Chris discusses the power of the white male stage manager producing the festival

and seems to indicate his presence serves to de-queer their efforts. Other discussions of gatekeeping are more literal when Ella discusses the influence bouncers have on shaping the space, deciding what bodies get to enter it and how they enter it.

Gibson-Graham's (1996) invitation to queer 'capitalist organisation' invited us to see capitalist spaces as 'open and permeable' (p. 544). Through this, I see queered spaces as existing alongside, and within, other capitalist normative spaces. Ella seems to sense this when she discusses the careful negotiation needed to keep the membrane of capitalist spaces open:

> "*We need to sort of slowly claw our power away from them, and if we make a sudden movement or try and do too much too quickly the door's just going to get shut on us again*"

These tensions between straight and slanted lines, capitalist / normative and queered space show that attempts to queer spaces can produce new straightening lines. This reflects the tensions that live in debates on the possible 'death' of Queer Theory (Rumens, 2017), when attempts to deconstruct the norms of scholarship might create new clichéd lines (Parker, 2016; Pullen et al, 2016; Rumens et al. 2019). Its power remains in examining the contradictions and frictions that appear when we question how these normative lines appear and the effects they produce. In keeping sight of these tensions and contradictions, the use of Queer Theory in MOS scholarship can allow us not to produce a 'how to' on queerer organisational spaces, but to destabilise the 'normative ontologies' of organising (Rumens, 2017, p. 54).

Queering organising

Directions of queer organising

If we imagine queered space as spaces where bodies might not readily align on certain lines, even slanted ones, queering organisational spaces might invite us to imagine collective action where bodies are free to turn to or away from any object. In Queer Phenomenology, the collective is "formed out of shared direction. […] A 'we' emerges as an effect of a shared direction toward an object" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 117). This produces a certain set of lines which determine boundaries as well as the direction towards which "energy, time and resources are 'directed'" (p. 119). In opposition, we can imagine other, queerer collectives that emerge by turning away from certain directions, from collective refusals to follow certain lines, such as "the line of whiteness" (p. 156). Queering organising opens up the possibility of turning away from other lines, such as the way "things are done" (Rumens, 2017, p. 55).

One such opening is questioning whether some forms of organising are possible without bodies turning to the same object or following the same direction. The collective organised by Chris, Lupe and Ella is, among other things, a Facebook community, a festival, a promoter, and a lobby for safer space policies in the wider music scene. The collective formed out of shared rejection of certain lines in the music scene (heteronormativity) and some existing LGBT+ spaces such as Pride (cisnormativity, whiteness). As they took on what was available, reached for the objects that were 'in front' of them, other things became out of reach (Ahmed, 2006, p. 14). Indeed, the collective took a direction, focused on organising festivals and concerts as part of the capitalist, mainstream scene in efforts to queer it, as discussed above. In our discussions, Chris shared being "*a bit confused about the direction that [they are] going in*", and their subsequent disappointment:

"I feel like we've become promoters and for me,... as an artist I'm working towards promoters not existing because if there's a venue and I'm an artist why am I going through a promoter? [...] But that's just the way it's gone."

The acceptance hinted at in this last sentence seems to indicate how quickly the direction taken can make certain objects unreachable. As Ahmed notes, "we do not have to consciously exclude those things that are not 'on line'. The direction we take excludes things for us, before we even get there" (p. 15). If queering space is turning away from the straightening effects of certain lines, as explored previously, then queering organising could be allowing bodies to turn energy, time and resources freely to other directions.

Queering the pace of organising

These lines might direct bodies not only in space, but in and through time as well. Ahmed leaves an exploration of time open by discussing the genealogical background of bodies, objects and space. Here I want instead to pay attention to what might happen when bodies are turned towards a same object, follow a same line, but do so at a different pace. Just like Ahmed imagines straightening devices as turning our attentions toward objects, we might imagine them as attempts to turn our attentions at specific moments. Freeman (2010) refers to *chrononormativity* as the way bodies are organised in time for 'maximum productivity' through various devices such as "schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches" that "seem natural to those whom they privilege" (2010, p. 3). What would it mean to imagine queer organising in such a way as to remove expectations of punctuality, 'doing things in time', etc?

This need to recognise the variety of paces at which bodies might extend into a space is something Lupe is sensitive to ("*you give yourself permission to operate at your own pace, at your own time, and love and respect everyone else's ways of time and space*"). They prefer meetings in the afternoons for days when they "*struggle to get out of bed*". Yet, queering organisational time can produce tensions as well. Ella discusses the frustration of moving at a different pace from Chris ("*sometimes I'll solve a problem and then an hour later after I've already done my solutions someone else will come up with another solution to the problem")*, and having to fight against the instinct to work on her own. Chris notes their disappointment at being berated for being late to a meeting:

> "*I've just left a job where [...] you're just being constantly watched or harassed about your punctuality [...]. I didn't set that meeting up, I wasn't lead, you know, I was kind of there to support that meeting and also coming from work so I didn't feel particularly worried that I was ten minutes late. But it's just that kind of thing of like okay, well you've made your point now, are you going to keep bringing it up, that I was once late for this meeting. Because that's what they do at work and that's just very stressful*".

In noticing the similarities between their friends' expectation and that of capitalist spaces, they show a disorientation. Perhaps, Chris had not expected such a familiar line to appear, nor to be 'kept in line' over it.

As noted above in the previous section, if spatial boundaries are porous between capitalist and non-capitalist spaces (Gibson-Graham, 1996), so too are lines that direct bodies in time:

"*My current thing is getting stressed about the fact that we're being given good opportunities, but because everybody's not working as one, or meeting with their targets and the things that they're expected to do it's going to basically affect all of us. [...] what if we're doing this ... all of this for nothing, what if nothing good comes out of it just because this person can't be bothered to do this, or we don't have a clear policy for this. And it feels like we're walking on a really thin line.*"

(Ella)

Here, Ella notes the 'thin line' on which the collective is. This line is a boundary between being 'in' the space, when everyone 'meets their targets' on time, and opportunities are within reach, and falling 'out of line' when targets are missed and opportunities grow distant. In other words, following different timelines might restrict the field of action. When bodies are turned towards different objects, or turn to the same object but at different moment in time, bodies might not extend into that space as readily, or other spaces and the objects that dwell in them might become out of reach.

What to make of these tensions in time and space when imagining queerer forms of organising? One possibility is to turn to the way queering space and queering organising might not allow bodies to turn to every directions at any given time, but to think of how they might *be free* to turn this or that way, a commitment 'not to presume' that certain lines have to be followed (Ahmed, 2006, p. 178). If "what is available is what might reside as a point on this line" (p. 14), then imagining queer organising as allowing bodies to turn to various directions means allowing for more things to be 'reachable' (p. 14) or fewer things to become 'out of reach'. It means widening the field of possible

action. After all, queerness is not about the 'here and now', but "an insistence on potentiality […] for another world" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1).

Conclusion

Queer Theory has been useful in MOS scholarship to draw attention to the norms that impose limits on the ways lives are "lived out in the workplace" (Rumens, 2017, p. 53). Fewer authors have used it to bring forth and question modes of organising and what counts as 'normal' in organisational life (Parker, 2002), much less organisational space (Riach & Wilson, 2014). Answering Rumens et al.'s (2019) call to imagine queer modes of organising, I have offered in this article Ahmed's Queer Phenomenology (2006) as a useful theoretical tool to examine the ways capitalist and other normative spaces queer bodies. As Queer Theory, Queer Phenomenology allows us to critically question attempts to 'include' queered subjects in organisational life (Benozzo et al., 2015), which might extend "the straight line to some queers, those who can inhabit" straight spaces, while keeping other queers 'off line' (Ahmed 2006, p. 173).

I have furthered attempts to explore embodied Queer Theory (Muhr et al., 2016), which helps move past the limits of using discourse-based identity politics as a starting point to understand placemaking for queer bodies. Because Queer Phenomenology allows us to focus on bodies rather than discursive identities, it avoids the risk we run to render some identities invisible when we focus on others (Ahmed & Swan, 2006; McDonald, 2016) or the risk to essentialise them (Rumens, 2017). For example, in paying attention to the multiple 'backgrounds' that lines have in spaces such as the office or the charity shop, I have drawn attention to the way a body can be queered not just because it is 'read as female' in a gendered space, but because this is done in space that also

presupposes specific economic power relations, such as Ella turning away from feminist orientations to find future employments, or Lupe experiencing disorientation from the space of a charity shop because their financial situation makes certain objects out of reach for them.

More importantly, Queer Phenomenology has allowed me to move away from conceptions of 'queer space' as a space 'for' LGBT subjects, which might contain its own normative lines as noted by critics of the 'gay bar'. Instead, thinking of *queering* space helps imagine ways we might resist capitalist spaces, refuse their straightening effects, and attempt to disorient them by stepping out of line. In the empirical exploration of these concepts, I have highlighted the tensions that can appear in these attempts, when old or new orientating lines are always susceptible to re-appear. Drawing from Gibson-Graham's (1996) call to think of the porous 'membrane' of capitalist space, I have explored how queered spaces are also shaped at the boundaries, and highlighted the contradictions that appear through the straightening effects of drawing a line at the door.

Because space in Queer Phenomenology is defined as a 'field of action' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 64), it is particularly suited to a transposition on questions of organising. Here, I have shown that organising too can be queered by considering what might happen when bodies do not turn towards the same objects, or do so at a different pace. Again, by paying attention to the tensions highlighted by the empirical analysis, I have discussed the fragility of such a project, as directions seem to be readily taken from the objects that are nearer at a moment in time. Via a detour into the concept of chrononormativity (Freeman, 2010) I have also opened up consideration of the normative pace of organising, and the conditions of existence of alternative paces. What we can conclude from these limits is that failures to 'queer' space do not reduce the radical potential of such efforts. While directions do need to be taken at a moment in time for collective action, a queer freedom lies in

keeping open "the possibility of changing directions and of finding other paths" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 178).

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